Ten Steps to a Successful Spring Vegetable Garden

Small raised vegetable gardens are easy to maintain, yet they can provide lots of vegetables

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Spring isn’t the only time you can start a vegetable garden. But it is the most popular time, so let’s explore what’s involved.

1. Make sure your site gets plenty of sun and is relatively flat. Choose an area that is well drained. Sites on a slope can be terraced. Use raised beds enclosed by lumber or concrete blocks on poor soil like heavy clay. Raised beds are even effective on asphalt and concrete.

2. Locate your garden plot conveniently. The closer to your kitchen the better. You could even call it a “kitchen garden.” Also locate the garden near a source of water. Irrigation is important in our hot climate.

3. Start with a plan. Decide what vegetables you like to eat and want to plant, and where in the garden they’ll be located. Start small. The garden can be enlarged as you gain experience and time permits.

4. You can garden more “intensively” in a small plot. Small plots are easier to water, mulch, weed, and fertilize. Therefore seeds or plants can be spaced the minimum distance between plants in every direction. The “minimum distance” is the distance between plants (after thinning) in a row as recommended on the seed packet. Follow all the other directions on the packet too.

5. Get your soil tested to find out what nutrients it needs. Visit your county Extension office for the soil test mailing kit. In Leon County, the office is located at 615 Paul Russell Road.

6. You have the options of planting seeds directly in the soil, purchasing transplants, or starting your own transplants six to eight weeks before planting time. For spring gardens, the planting time for frost tender plants is about the first of April. The average date of last
Frost is March 22nd. If you plant earlier, be prepared to cover your tender vegetables to protect them from late frosts. Frost hardy vegetables may be planted much earlier. In fact members of the cabbage family, Asian greens, carrots, radishes, onions, and turnips etc., can be planted in the fall.

7. The only tools you really need are a shovel, hoe, garden rake, and a hand weeder.

8. Plant early enough so that your vegetables have time to mature before the last of June. This is when the heat of summer sets in and insect pests and plant diseases are more common. For best results, choose varieties recommended for Florida.

9. Water and fertilize as needed.

10. Keep an eye out for pests! Use garden chemicals sparingly and only if necessary. Use the least toxic products first, like Bacillus thuringensis (BT) and insecticidal soap. Remember that many insecticides are non-selective and kill the beneficial insects, mites, and spiders as well as the pests. This can lead to a vicious cycle of having to apply insecticides more frequently... not a good thing to do if you can avoid it. Many pests can be removed simply with a strong stream of water or by hand picking them and dropping them into a can of soapy water. For more information on pest control and other gardening issues, obtain the UF-IFAS Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/VH/VH02100.pdf

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